

Emotional Openness and Attitudes Towards Self-disclosure During Counseling among Junior Secondary School Students in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria.

By

OBIBUBA Ijeoma M.

*School of Early Childhood Care and Primary Education,
Nwafor Orizu College of Education,
Anambra State, Nigeria.*

ABSTRACT

. This study empirically investigates the correlation between emotional openness and attitudes towards self-disclosure, it also investigated the relationship between clients' sociocultural background and attitudes towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions. The sample comprised 400 male and female students who were randomly selected from 8 Junior Secondary Schools in Anaocha LGA of Anambara State, Descriptive statistics, analysis of variance and correlation analysis were adopted to analyze the data. The study found a significant relationship exist between emotional openness and attitudes of Junior Secondary School students towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions, The finding also reveals a significant correlation between the sociocultural background of the students and attitude towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions. This study concludes that female students assign lower levels of emotional openness towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions compared to male students. Again, the results also reveals that, majority of the students prefer to disclose their personal problems with counselors they share the same cultural identity with. Therefore, this study recommends that government should put forward several in-service training and workshops including conferences aimed at increasing counsellor skills to reduce low self disclosure among clients during counselling. The study also recommends that, the government; the private sectors as well as Non-governmental Organizations should intensify efforts to improve counselors-students ratios across all the Junior Secondary Schools in the study location.

Keywords: Attitude towards self-disclosure, emotional openness, guidance and counseling sessions, ethnicity.

1. Introduction

Counseling is an important and developmental tool in nature. It is a vital tool in modifying maladaptive behaviours as well as assisting individuals to overcome their different problems; such problems could be educationally, vocationally, or socio-personally oriented. The enormity of its importance probably account for its recognition by the Federal Government of Nigeria and its subsequent inclusion in the Nigeria National Policy on Education (NNPE, 1977: pg 53).

In view of the apparent ignorance of many young people about career prospects, and in view of personality maladjustment among school children, career officers and counselors shall be appointed in post-primary institutions. Since qualified personnel in this category are scarce, government shall continue to make provisions for the training of interested teachers in guidance and counseling. Guidance and counseling shall also feature in teacher education programme. Proprietors of schools shall provide guidance and counselors in adequate number in each primary and post-primary schools (NNPE, 1977: pg 53).

The inclusion of counselling in the school system by the Federal Government of Nigeria is geared towards curbing challenges of learners in relation to their problems, be it development educationally, socially, vocationally, and psychologically among others. The training and employment of counsellors to schools is to help in moldings maladaptive behaviours of learners.

A counsellor is a trained mental professional who aims to create a confidential relationship with people in distress so they can safely express their thoughts and feelings and make sense of painful or confusing experiences. This process allows people to find themselves the best way to manage problems, make changes in their lives and often the symptoms dissipate (Sheu & Sedlacek, 2017; Sue & Sue, 2018).

Despite the proliferation of guidance and counseling departments and offices across all institutions and federal establishments including the grassroots level in Nigeria, psychologists and educational counselors have decried low degree of self-disclosure between counselors and clients during counseling sessions (Baysden, 2018; Davis, 2019; Pandit, 2018; Masaviru, Mwangi & Masindano, 2018). In addition, studies (Rosenfeld & Civikly, 2018; Goodstein & Reinecker, 2018; Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2018; Tang et al., 2020; Wood, 2019) have shown that even the provision of enabling environment by all government establishments and institutions the degree of self-disclosure among clients to counselors has continue to witness a downward trajectory overtime.

However, talking too much about ourselves early in a relationship may not facilitate the development of friendship because too much disclosure might be viewed as being insecure. As a result, self-disclosure may lead to rejection because of not being liked or accepted (Steinberg, 2019). Nevertheless, self-disclosure is subject to various issues and factors. A number of factors influence when to disclose and when not to disclose. Self-disclosure can also have a dark side, particularly if the recipient is unhelpful or rejecting.

The need for counseling services among the junior secondary school students in Sub-Saharan African Countries is well documented in the counseling literature (Baysden, 2018; Davis, 2019; Pandit, 2018). For many students, this period represents the first major transition and adjustment in familiar support and resources (Baysden, 2018). Coupled with novel decisions and challenges, this period also epitomizes a time of identity exploration (Marcia & Martins, 2017), transition into more adult roles and responsibilities (Levinson, 2018), and more concrete career choice and development (Super & Arthur 2018).

The Ministry of Education (2019) reports that 2, 617,556 students were admitted into Junior Secondary Schools across the public and private schools in Nigeria in which majority are from the Eastern part of the country. Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambara State has remained the host of the highest percentage of these students for the past three decades especially the Federal Unity Schools. The growing numbers of these populations suggest a need to address factors influencing the dispositions of these students to self-disclosure during counseling sessions.

Though the junior secondary school students may be in great need of professional counseling to help deal with stressors, studies contend a low degree of emotional openness and self-disclosure during counseling sessions and that students are more apt to self-disclose their traumatic problems with the counseling units in their various schools (Baysden & Badmus, 2016). Studies (such as: Leong & Sedlacek, 2019; Anderson & Myer, 2019) reveal that even when students disclose themselves during counseling sessions, they don't give the counselor the full details of the emotional problems they are going through and they remain more likely to secede than their counterparts in other parts of the developing countries.

Researches have shown that the prevalence of rape, sexual harassment and HIV infection in the developed countries, is second only to sub-Saharan African country like Nigeria globally (Day, Devieux, & Reid, 2018; UNAIDS/WHO, 2017). Substance use and abuse are increasing at an alarming rate (Day, Devieux & Reid, 2016) and psychological problems such as depression and anxiety (Ali & Toner, 2019; Halcon et al., 2018; Marwaha & Livingston, 2018) are also prevalent. Other factors such as increasing conduct and behavioral problems, particularly in schools (Dudley-Grant, 2019; Halcon et al., 2018); incest, sexual and physical abuse (Halcon et al. 2018) and the accompanying mental health symptoms are also very rampant among junior secondary school students in Nigeria. However, these conditions are often left untreated due to avoidance factors

which are culturally based (Schreiber, Stern & Wilson, 2018) and low rate of self-disclosure to school counselors during counseling sessions (Campbell, Cornish & Mclean, 2017 & Watters, 2018).

A group of individuals with a shared culture can be classified as an ethnic group. Ethnicity is a classification given when people identify themselves as being a part of an ethnic group, establishing their cultural and ethnic identity. Cultural identity is a construct that encompasses a person's "cultural practices, values, and identifications" (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010, p. 237). A component of cultural identity, ethnic identity can be defined as "an enduring, fundamental aspect of the self that includes a sense of membership in an ethnic group and the attitudes and feelings associated with that membership" and is influenced by the experience of acculturation. This identity reflects the value clients place on their native culture when "surrounded by groups of counselors to which they are to self-disclose their various problems during counseling sessions" (Andrew & Safaradeen, 2017). According to a study conducted by Evelyn and Pasio (2016) in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, ethnic background play a prominent role in clients' self-disclosure during counseling sessions, some clients prefer to self-disclose their emotional problems with counselors they share the same cultural identity with.

Low emotional openness, strong ethnicity identity and low self-disclosure among the junior secondary students may have negative effect on students' academic performance, increase the rate of drop-out among students. It may also contributes to an increase in substance abuse, suicide ideology, academic problems, somatic symptoms, decreased self-esteem, and inter-personal and familial problems among other problems.

In view, of the aforementioned problems, this paper seeks to provide answers to the research questions below.

I. What is the coefficient of correlation between emotional openness and the attitudes of junior secondary schools students towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambara State?

II. What is the coefficient of correlation between sociocultural background and the attitudes of junior secondary schools students towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambara State?

Self-disclosure

Cozby, Andrew, Freeman and Dorren (2018) conceptualized self-disclosure as "any information about himself which Person A communicates verbally to Person B". This

broad definition sets these criteria: (i) self-disclosure must contain personal information about Person A, (ii) the information must be verbally communicated to a target Person B, and (iii) the information must be verbally communicated by the discloser. The definition proposed by Worthy Gary and Kahn (2016) places further restrictions on what is to be considered self-disclosure. They defined self disclosure as "that which occurs when A knowingly communicates to B information about A which is not generally known and is not otherwise available to B". Therefore, following this formulation, the criteria of intentionality and privacy were added to the operational definition.

Goodstein and Reinecker (2018) considered still another element to be an important parameter of self-disclosure. Pointing out that such aspects of the self as feelings, values, ideas, and experiences are more central or important to the individual, they contended that self-disclosure should be limited to the "intentional revealing of these more central aspects of the self". Combining the elements offered by these writers, there are different criteria for self-disclosure, namely: first, it contains personal information about the discloser. Second, the discloser verbally communicates the information. Third, the information is intentionally communicated. Fourth, the information is private. Fifth, it deals with some aspect of himself or herself which the discloser considers important. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, self-disclosure is defined as verbally communicated information about herself or himself which is important to him or her (centrality) and which would ordinarily be private rather than public information (intimacy).

Emotional Openness: The degree to which a person is comfortable talking to a counselor about personally distressing information during counseling sessions (Kahn & Hessling, 2014).

Culture: Culture can be defined as the distinctive features and way of life shared by a group of people in a place or time; this includes shared "beliefs and values, habits, customs and norms, language, religion, history, geography, or kinship" (Uhlmann et al., 2016, Diversity is Cultural section). Culture impacts the way we communicate, structure societies, "make or build things, express feelings and emotions, and respond to the world" (Uhlmann et al., 2016, Diversity is Cultural section). All cultures are learned behaviors heavily influenced by familial and societal socialization. As people learn from their environment and experiences, they develop a sense of ethnic and cultural identity, which is a construct that encompasses a person's cultural practices, values, and identifications (Cozby *et al.*, 2018).

Empirical Reviews on Attitudes towards Self-disclosure

Hanson, Gulack, Haman and Aragon (2018) qualitatively researched 18 clients using grounded theory and found self-disclosure to have both a positive and a negative effect both on the clients and the counselors' privacy.

Audet and Everall (2019) used a phenomenological methodology to qualitatively study nine participants and found that self-disclosure had both facilitative and hindering effects. Audet (2018) found that self-disclosure can blur the therapeutic boundaries. However, when it is used skilfully it can enhance the relationship. Likewise Bottrill, Pistrang, Barker, and Worrell (2019) used phenomenology to qualitatively study 14 trainee clinical psychologists and determined that working out one's approach to self-disclosure is a challenge for trainee therapists and that support is often required to master the skill.

Levitt et al. (2019), using a naturalistic methodology, qualitatively examined therapist self-disclosure within 52 two-therapy dyads and found both positive and negative results. Self-disclosure that humanized the therapist seemed to have a more positive affect than disclosure that expressed encouragement. Self-disclosure that highlighted similarity with the therapist seemed to have a more positive impact than disclosure that failed to convey either similarity or dissimilarity.

Knox, Hess, Petersen, and Hill (2018) qualitatively studied 13 adult clients in therapy, through phenomenology, and found self-disclosure to have a positive effect on discussing their important personal issues. This was in the context of the therapists being perceived by the clients as intending to normalize or reassure them and consisted of their provision of non-current information.

Burkard, Knox, Groen, Perez, and Hess (2019) qualitatively researched 11 European American psychotherapists' self-disclosure in cross-cultural settings phenomenologically. The results were positive when the therapists shared their own views on racist and oppressive attitudes, with the intention of enhancing the relationship.

Andersen and Anderson (2018) used multiple regression analysis and granger causality to assess the factors that influence clients' disposition to self-disclosure during counseling sessions using self-disclosure and the demographic variables related to a therapist's use or non-use of self-disclosure. The researchers surveyed (Andersen & Anderson, 2018). Their results indicate that counselors used self-disclosure with their clients and their disclosures increased with therapy experience. Specifically, counselors with one year or less therapy experience disclosed less than therapists with 2-5 years' experience or 10+

years' experience (Heneretty & Levitt, 2017; Andersen & Anderson, 2018). Also, Andersen and Anderson found that counselors prefer using self-disclosures that reveal their emotional reactions to client's behavior when the goal of the disclosure was to help the client understand how others perceive them. Counselors used positive affective responses the most frequently with clients but fantasies, images, and negative affective statements were also popular counselor self-disclosures (Andersen & Anderson, 2018).

Methodology

Following the studies of Aromashodun (2016); Bolanle (2018) and Aderibigbe *et al.* (2017) this study used apurposive sampling technique to randomly select respondents from 8 sampled junior secondary schools in Anaocha LGA of Anambara State. This study selected a sample size of 400 respondents as a representative of the study population, comprising 200 female and 200 male students from the eight selected secondary schools in the study locations. The researcher purposively sampled 8 JSS II secondary schools, 4 co-educational, two girls secondary and boys' secondary schools. In each of the schools, the researcher randomly sampled 50 students from each of the JSS II class given it a total of 400 students which constituted the sample size. The target population for this study were the Junior Secondary School Students (which comprises male and female) in Anaocha LGA of Anambara State.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This section presents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents which include gender (that is, male and female), age, religion affiliations and ethnicity. The table below depicts the frequencies and percentages of the socio-demographic background of the respondents.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender (N 399)		
Male	185	46.4
Female	214	53.6
Age		
10-13	290	72.7
12-14	100	25.0
13-15	9	2.3

Religion Affiliations		
Catholic	350	87.7
Anglican	20	5.0
Baptist	24	6.0
Other	5	1.3
Ethnicity (sociocultural background)		
Igbo	340	85.2
Yoruba	39	9.8
Hausa	16	4.0
Other	4	1.0

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

The table above shows that a total of 46.5% of the respondents were male while 53.6% were female. This means that the population were fairly distributed among genders. The table further shows that 72.7% of the respondents constitute the age bracket of 10-13 years while 25.0% constitute the age bracket of 12-14 years and 2.3% proportion of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 13-15 respectively.

Further, based on ethnicity, Igbo constitutes 85.2% of the respondents while the proportion of Yoruba stands at 9.8%, Hausa constituted 4% of the respondents while 1% of the respondents belong to other ethnicity.

Analysis of the correlation between emotional openness and attitude towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions.

This section presents the analysis of the data collected from the field in order to test the validity of the study hypothesis. Therefore, the section begins with correlation analysis of the variables of interest.

Table 2: t-distribution statistics for Emotional Openness and Attitudes towards Self-disclosure

	R	F	df1	df2	Sig.
	0.319	*55.67	1	399	.000

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

* Variables are significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Variables are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Correlation between Emotional Openness and Attitudes towards Self-disclosure

	Dependent Variable	ATSDDCS	OE
Pearson Correlation	Total ATSDDCS score	1.000	0.319
	Total DDI Score	0.319	1.000
	Total ATSDDCS score	0.000	.000
	Total DDI Score	0.000	0.0
	Total ATSDDCS score	399	399
	Total DDI Score	399	399

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Total ATSDDCS score (Attitude towards Self-disclosure during Counseling Sessions) Total DDI Score (Distress Disclosure Index), EO (Emotional Openness)

a Predictors: (Constant), Total DDI Score

b Dependent Variable: Total ATSDDCS Score

ANOVA was conducted to evaluate how well the level of emotional openness predicted the attitudes towards self-disclosure among male and female students.. The predictor was the level of emotional openness while the criterion variable is the attitudes towards self-disclosure. The linear relationship of emotional openness was significantly related to the attitudes towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions [F (1, 399) =55.67, p<.01]. The result shows that emotional openness is a significant predictor of the attitudes towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions among junior secondary school students. .Therefore, the alternative hypothesis that says the coefficients of correlation between emotional openness and attitudes of clients towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions is statistically significant is hereby validated against the null hypothesis. By implication, the result in the table above illustrates that the male students had a slightly high emotional openness during counselling sessions which made them self-disclose some of their emotional problems with the counselors during sessions compared to the female students who had low emotional openness and low self-disclosure during counseling sessions. This result corroborates the findings of Adegbite(2015); Bamidele (2016)and Mantel *et al.* (2012) who reported that emotional openness is one of the influencing factors against mstudents' attitudes towards self-disclosure.

Analysis of the correlation between clients’ sociocultural background and attitude towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions.

This section presents the analysis of the data collected from the field in order to test the validity of the study hypothesis. Therefore, the section begins with correlation analysis of the variables of interest.

Table 4: the t-distribution statistics for ethnicity and Attitudes towards Self-disclosure

	R	F	df1	df2	Sig.
	0.321	*68.18	1	399	.000

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

* Variables are significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Variables are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Correlation between Emotional Openness and Attitudes towards Self-disclosure

	Dependent Variable	ATSDDCS	Ethnicity
Pearson Correlation	Total ATSDDCS score	1.000	0.321
	Total DDI Score	0.321	1.000
	Total ATSDDCS score	0.000	.000
	Total DDI Score	0.000	0.0
	Total ATSDDCS score	399	399
	Total DDI Score	399	399

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Total ATSDDCS score (Attitude towards Self-disclosure during Counseling Sessions) Total DDI Score (Distress Disclosure Index), Ethnicity (Sociocultural background))

a Predictors: (Constant), Total DDI Score

b Dependent Variable: Total ATSDDCS Score

The table above shows a significant correlation between clients’ sociocultural background and attitudes towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions, the coefficient of correlation is significant at 0.05 level. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis that there is significant correlation between clients’ sociocultural background and

attitudes towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions is hereby accepted to be valid. In addition, ANOVA was also conducted to compare reported ethnicity to ethnic identity score among the ethnic groups. The mean ethnic identity score was significantly different between ethnic groups, $F(5, 52) = 3.75, p = .000, .$ As a group, the Igbo respondents had the highest mean ethnic identity score ($M = 3.26, SD = .43$) compared to respondents of other ethnicities, while individuals who reported other ethnicity had the lowest ($M = 2.73, SD = .30$). By implication, the result reveals that most respondents prefer to share their emotional problems with counselors they share the same ethnicity identity with during a counseling sessions.

Summary and Conclusion

Following the result of the survey conducted in this study, it was found that the female junior secondary school students had low attitudes towards self-disclosure due to low level of emotional openness compared to the male students. The study concludes that a low level of emotional openness influences negative attitudes towards self-disclosure among junior secondary school students, the fear of emotions and experiencing of pains negatively influence junior secondary school students towards self-disclosure during counseling sessions.

The study also found lapses on the part of the government in regards to the counselors-students ratios. According to American Psychological Association (2015), the benchmark for counselors-students ratio is two counselors to twelve students (2:12) while the counselors-students ratios in the sampled Junior Secondary Schools was two counselors to 1500 students (2:1500).

Recommendations

Following the results of the empirical findings in this survey thus far, this study recommends that: Highly qualified and trained employees are a critical component of any effective organization. The success of junior secondary school counseling centers, therefore, depends on the quality of the staff. Junior secondary school counseling programs need to invest in the continuous professional development of their staff to ensure sustained competence in dealing with students from different cultural backgrounds.

In an effort to facilitate the cultural competence of counselors, government, stakeholders and non-governmental organizations should enroll all guidance and counseling teachers at all levels in the Association for Multicultural Counseling Development (AMCD), put

forward several Multicultural Competencies that they deemed necessary for every counselor.

This study also recommends that the government and the stakeholders in the private sectors as well as the Non-governmental Organizations should intensify efforts to increase the number of guidance and counseling teachers across all the Secondary Schools in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambara State in order to meet up with the international standard.

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